



Excluding for inclusion? Policy and categorization practices in a school for all in Sweden

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The context of Sweden 2013

- Sweden has about 9,5 million habitants – 1.5 mill. children in school
- 88% in municipality schools and 12 % in free schools
- Pre-school 1-5 years old, Pre-school class: 6 years old
- Comprehensive school: 7-16 years old (compulsory)
- Upper Secondary school : 16-19 years old
- Early school leavers – 6.7 %
- Upper secondary completion rate: 82%
- Schools for Sami
- Schools for intellectually impaired children (12.100 pupils)
- Special schools for hearing impairments (516 pupils)
- Special teaching groups, mainly for children having ADHD or ASD

- Percentage of GDP spent on compulsory school: 7,3%
- Ethnic composition: 15% of the population is born in another country than Sweden (SCB 2012)
- Unemployment rate: 7,6 % (Dec 2012)



No official categorization system

- Officially, Sweden has an extremely low proportion of children being in need of special support
 - Classifications official:
 - Intellectually impaired (Learning disability)
 - Deaf and Hearing impairment
 - Visual impairment
 - Other classifications used in practice, for example:
 - Children in need of special support
 - ADHD
 - ASD, Aspergers
 - dyslexia
 - low intelligence
- etcetera



Background and problem

- How learning difficulties and school failure are, and have been, interpreted in policy and practice
- The implementation of an inclusive school system



Mass education in the 19th century

- Compulsory school –pupils from all social strata entered school –
However,
- Not all did fit in
- resulted in repeating grades, short period of schooling and leaving school without coming very far in their education
- mostly poor pupils and girls
- Thus, social class and gender were arguments for segregation
- Resulted in widespread political dissatisfaction



One school for all – again –early 20th century

- Intelligence test – “objective” and scientific” tool for evaluating pupils’ capacity to manage school
- Ability became an argument for segregation
- Repeating grades and remedial-classes
- Political opposition arguing that this social selection, deciding on pupils’ educational careers at an early age, discriminated children from low-income families and from rural parts (most pupils lived in rural parts at this time)



1940' s - one school for all

- Irrespective of social class and ability
- Resulted in a Swedish comprehensive school introduced in 1960' s. However,
- "everybody cannot be pushed in the same speed, in the same ways and towards the same goal"...some are "developing slower, are slow on the uptake and work more heavily and with restraints" (SOU 1945:60, p. 11)
- Individual differences – arguments for differentiation and argued to be the "best for everyone"
- Differentiation/Streaming is necessary – compensatory strategies
- Eight special classes



However, studies showed inequality

- In the mid 20th century 2/3 of all pupils in special classes were boys (SCB 1974:5)
- In classes for maladjusted 90 % were boys (Ahlström, 1986)
- Working class overrepresented (Husén, 1969)
- Increase in the number of pupils in special needs education.
1972 – 40% of the pupils in contact with some kind of special teaching (Lindensjö & Lundgren, 2000)
- Intense debate concerning equal access



One school for all – once more

- New curriculum in the 1980' s emphasising equality of opportunity”independent of gender, geographical residence and social economical conditions” (Lgr 80, p. 14)
- However,
- ”intellectual or physical handicaps, emotional or social disorders” – compensatory strategies were recommended
- Exclusional strategies as special teaching groups were argued to be necessary



1994: A goal- and resultoriented school

- Decentralising schools
- Issues of diversity handled on a local level
- Individualising teaching and meet "every individual pupil' s needs, abilities, experiences and thinking" (Lpo 94, p. 14).

- However,

- Need for continuing to segregate pupils into special teaching groups
- Diagnostic culture became influential – ADHD, Aspergers, dyslexia



Increase of special education

- Children diagnosed with ADHD, ASD, Socio-emotional behavioural problems – increasing
- 5-12% of the children "have" ADHD, mostly boys (Holmberg, 2009)
- About 20-25 % of the pupils still receive some kind of special support (Giota & Lundberg, 2007; Emanuelsson & Persson, 2006)
- Low PISA result (22th, 2009)
- Increase of special teaching groups
- Upper secondary completion rate: 82% (decreased) – boys and minority groups in majority



At present – an equal inclusive school?

- New Education Act and a new curriculum, implemented 2011
- schoolproblems should be solved within the regular class – the intention of inclusion
- Explicit goal of raising standard and everyone should reach the same goal
- In exceptional cases – placement in special teaching groups, short-term
- However, closing special teaching groups and including the pupils into mainstream make school leaders worried for not reaching the learning goals and for not being able to support children who need something extra



Concluding remarks

- Political device of having one school for all, has always been immediately connected to the necessity of having some strategies for segregation
- A societal dilemma: one school for all – not all fit in
- the pupils perceived difficulties are systematically located ‘inside’ the pupil. It is the ‘defective student’ rather than the ‘inefficient organization’ (Skrtic, 1991, p. 152) that is held to be the cause of the difficulties encountered when engaging in schooling
- Particularly boys from socially deprived backgrounds are excluded
- Extended use of assessments with an explicit goal of raising standards (everyone should reach the same goals) in order to improve the Swedish results in the PISA test could result in an extended special needs education with exclusion as a response
- A new threat towards an inclusive school system?